

NSC BRIEFING

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4 OCTOBER 1955

LAOS

- I. Fourteen-month-old dispute between Laotian government and rebel Pathet Lao over two northern provinces (Phong Saly and Sam Neua) now approaching critical juncture.
 - A. 10 Oct is deadline for reaching political settlement, under intermittent negotiation since Jan '55.
 1. 10th is last date for candidates to file for 25 Dec '55 national elections.
 - B. If settlement not reached, Laotian government will plan to hold elections in ten provinces under its control.
- II. International Control Commission is working on "outline of settlement" to be presented both sides but doubtful mutually acceptable one can be devised.
 - A. Pathet Lao chief, Prince Souphanouvong, last week refused to keep 30 September date for scheduled meeting with Laotian premier Katay.
 1. Prince claimed "aggressive actions" of government forces made site for meeting "insecure."
 - B. Even Indians term his excuse "ridiculous"; they believe results of Cambodian elections have convinced Pathets they should not test their strength at polls.
- III. Many observers, including Indians, believe the Communists are linking political settlement in Laos to progress on settlement in Vietnam.

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- A. However, if negotiations break down (as is anticipated), Pathets may intensify military operations.
 - B. In event of all-out Pathet attack, government plans vigorous counteroffensive.
- IV. Success of government's counter-attack plan doubtful in view poor military leadership and probability French would withdraw vital air supply.
- A. Substantial reinforcement of 5,200 government troops now in northern provinces might bring Viet Minh intervention on side of 6,300-man Pathet Lao force.
 - B. Laotians want Manila Pact signatories to take up problem, intervene if Viet Minh does.

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